

SEEKING JUSTICE—AND SOMETIMES FINDING IT

BY GRETA WODELE

UPI/OSALE THIRDT

Rep. Hilda Solis, D-Calif., was appalled last fall when she learned that the Environmental Protection Agency planned to pay families with children exposed to pesticides to participate in a study backed by corporate funding. Although she's serving only her third term in the House, she helped to build a coalition of veteran lawmakers to publicly demand that the EPA postpone the study. House Democratic heavyweights like Government Reform Committee ranking member Henry Waxman and Education and the Workforce Committee ranking member George Miller, both of California, and 35 other lawmakers signed a letter to the agency arguing that the study would set a "disturbing and dangerous precedent."

Solis followed up by drafting legislative language to impose a one-year moratorium on the testing. Her goal was to attach the provision to the EPA's fiscal 2006 spending measure. But first she had to win over Rep. Charles Taylor, R-N.C., who chairs the Appropriations subcommittee that handles that spending bill.

Solis instructed her staff and other Democratic aides to bombard Taylor with relevant information. The tactic seemed to work. When Solis offered her amendment on the House floor in May, Taylor said he would not oppose it, and the House agreed to it by voice vote. After heated debate in the Senate, Congress in late July approved compromise language that puts a moratorium on human testing until the EPA administrator establishes final regulations, a six-month process.

Solis's aggressive actions to implement the moratorium reflect her tenacious legislative style. In fact, this East Los Angeles lawmaker has enjoyed several victories in the House, despite her status as a junior member of the minority party.

Solis, 47, has focused on environmental problems in urban minority communities since she served during the 1990s in the California Legislature, where she was the first Latina elected to the state Senate. In 2000, the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation gave her a Profile in Courage award for her work on "environmental justice" legislation in the state Senate, making her the first woman to receive the award. "Solis



HILDA SOLIS: Despite her status as a junior House Democrat, she has managed to score a few wins on "environmental justice" for urban minority communities.

took on entrenched economic interests as she sought relief for minority communities that suffered the ill effects of haphazard enforcement of environmental laws," the foundation said.

Since her election to Congress in 2000, Solis has been moving up her party's leadership ladder. Waxman said that Solis's doggedness, passion, and past success motivated him to ask House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., to give Solis a plum assignment on the Energy and Commerce Committee. There, Solis is now the ranking member on the Environment and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee. The panel's chairman, Rep. Paul Gillmor, R-Ohio, concedes that Solis has earned his respect. "I think she's serious and she works hard at her job," Gillmor said.

Solis also serves as a regional whip, helping to count the votes of Southern California lawmakers, for House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, D-Md. She is the Democratic chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues and chair of the Democratic Women's Working Group.

Senior Democrats expect Solis to go far. "The decision to rise is up to her," Pelosi said. "When I'm asked who the future leaders of tomorrow are, I always name Hilda Solis high on that list." House Democratic Caucus Chairman Robert Menendez, D-N.J., said that although environmental justice is not a "front-burner issue," Solis's work provides an opportunity to improve the quality of life for millions of Latinos.

In an interview, Solis said she strives to be a voice for poor Hispanics and other low-income people. She makes her case in the Republican-controlled House by doing her homework, and if that doesn't help, she says, she doesn't hesitate to employ a little humiliation. "It's almost to the point that you embarrass them," Solis said. "[Democrats] can raise issues. Oftentimes, they are common-sensical, rational issues. And when you bring them up ... the public agrees with you."

Colleagues of both parties say that Solis's idealistic nature drives her to get results. One Democratic aide who has worked with Solis said that at times, she shows her frustration with the legislative process, but added, "With experience, she'll learn."

So far, Solis's on-the-job training has been going pretty well. During the sum-

WAR & DESTINY

*How the Bush Revolution
in Foreign and Military Affairs
Redefined American Power*

JAMES KITFIELD

The U.S.-led "global war on terror" and the Iraq campaign are redefining the American epoch. To the all-important question of how the United States would wield its predominant power after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, President Bush and his team of top advisers fashioned a revolutionary answer: an America unconstrained by traditional bonds, its armed forces honed to a dominating edge by military transformation, could not just contain but decisively defeat the emerging threats of the 21st century—nihilistic Islamic terrorism, the spread of doomsday weapons, and the proliferation of failed or rogue states that feed those scourges.

The outcome of that struggle remains uncertain and significant tactical victories have been achieved. However, fundamental flaws have also emerged in the Pentagon's transformational war-fighting model and the Bush doctrine that guides it—flaws that threaten to sap the long-term strength of the U.S. military and leave the nation isolated on the world stage.

So contends award-winning journalist James Kitfield. As with his critically acclaimed *Prodigal Soldiers*, this story of how America arrived at this fateful crossroads is a narrative full of drama and personal anecdote, rich in context and detail. Through interviews with the key players and his own observations, Kitfield takes the reader from the top war councils in Washington, D.C. to the fighting in the sands of Iraq and guerrilla war on the streets of Baghdad.

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *WAR & DESTINY*

"Masterful! An incredibly insightful portrayal of war, diplomacy, national security policy-making, and the struggle for American success in Iraq. He reports it, he lives it, and he analyzes it. Kitfield is a must-read for anyone who wants a realistic, balanced look at U.S. actions under the leadership of Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld."

— Gen. Wesley Clark, USA (ret.), author of *Winning Modern Wars: Iraq, Terrorism and the American Empire*

"James Kitfield is a human Global Hawk, scanning the Iraqi battlefield from the heavens. And just like the military's latest spy drone, Kitfield's finely tuned journalistic sensors zoom in amazingly close to the action, in many cases because he actually was there. From the Pentagon to the front lines, he gets it right—once again—in *War & Destiny*."

— Mark Thompson, senior correspondent, *Time*

"In his brilliant narrative *War & Destiny*, James Kitfield powerfully chronicles how the war in Iraq has brought us to a crossroads... Like his previous book, *Prodigal Soldiers*, *War & Destiny* will become a preeminent reference for a critical period in our country's military history."

— Gen. Barry McCaffrey, USA (ret.), Bradley Distinguished Professor of International Security Studies, U.S. Military Academy

ISBN 1-57488-959-1; Cloth; 336 Pages; \$27.50

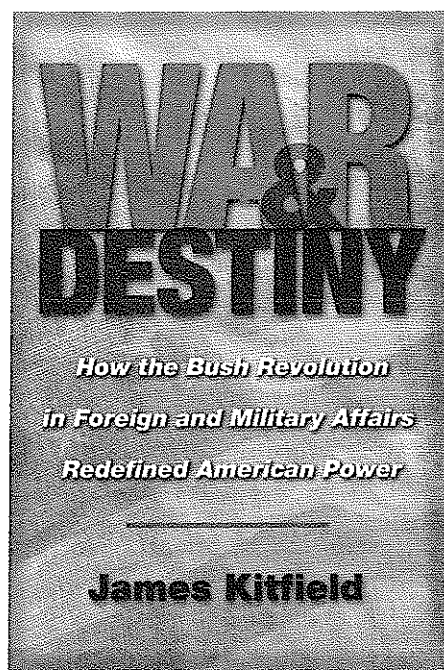
In Bookstores Now or Available for Direct Order from Potomac Books, Inc.



Potomac Books, Inc.

P.O. Box 960, Herndon, VA 20172 Tel: 800-775-2518 Fax: 703-661-1501

www.potomacbooksinc.com



mer, she and other congressional Democrats—backed by civil-liberties and environmental groups—slammed the EPA after it said it would not consider race or economic factors in its regulation. Solis's effort helped to secure a provision in the EPA funding bill barring the agency from working "in contravention of, or to delay the implementation of," a 1994 executive order issued by President Clinton requiring the EPA to identify and address the environmental impact of its regulations and programs on low-income and minority communities. Clinton's executive order inspired a 1999 California law that Solis authored, the first state law of its kind.

Solis was an initial sponsor of legislation to give citizenship status to immigrants who have served a year in the military (previous law required three years of service), and in 2003, President Bush signed the change into law. In addition, she successfully pushed for Congress to require the Interior Department to restore the water flow of the San Gabriel River and study ways to create more urban recreation areas.

Solis first came to the House by defeating 18-year veteran Rep. Matthew Martinez in a bitter 2000 Democratic primary. Martinez had lost support among liberal activist groups after voting for a ban on late-term abortions and for presidential trade-negotiating authority. "I think she learned how not to behave," said Waxman, who had helped Martinez first win election in 1982. In the primary, Solis beat Martinez 62 percent to 28 percent. Since then, she has easily won re-election in her strongly Democratic district.

Solis would like to parlay her success into a larger role within the Democratic Party, helping to reach out to Hispanic communities across the country and ensure that Democrats do not lose any more ground with Latino voters. In California, Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger won a significant portion of the Latino vote in his 2003 gubernatorial election. And in Solis's own district, George W. Bush increased his share of the presidential vote from 31 percent in 2000 to 37 percent in 2004.

"The Democratic Party has to be more vigilant in opening up doors of opportunity for Hispanic leaders to participate in leadership," Solis said. "I just don't speak for poor people in the 32nd District." ■

The author, a reporter for *CongressDaily*, can be reached at gwoodele@nationaljournal.com.